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FIVE WEEKS IN CANADA

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Compliment*

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'For the sake of a holding which he can call his own, the Englishman will cross the seas, plant himself on the prairie or amidst the primeval forest, and make for himself a home. The solitude of the wilderness has no fears for him; the society of his wife and family is sufficient, and he cares for no other'

Smiles

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It was in the summer of 1882 that I determined to vary the accustomed routine of Continental travel by seeking "pastures new" in Western Canada. Being myself a Colonist, and having already travelled far afield in Australia, New Zealand, the Cape of Good Hope, and some of the minor Colonies, I naturally felt a strong desire to make myself personally acquainted with the great Dominion. Accompanied by a well-tried and trusty comrade, I crossed the Atlantic without encountering any other than the usual experiences of so everyday a passage. Suffice it to say that our party of nearly a thousand souls embraced representatives of every class—including members of the Legislature and the learned professions, the Universities and public schools, homeward-bound Colonists, and others in search of a new home amongst their countrymen beyond the seas. Not the least interesting units were contributed by Cardinal Manning's and Dr. Barnardo's training schools, and I rejoiced to hear since my return that these promising lads speedily found remunerative employment at Ottawa and Hamilton.

I will not weary my readers by attempting to describe the voyage up the mighty St. Lawrence, the picturesque quaintness of Quebec, the hospitality of the merchant-princes of Montreal, official life at Ottawa, the intellectual life of Toronto, or the thunders of Niagara—as to do so would be but repeating an oft-told tale. It will be my endeavour briefly to relate my impressions of the world beyond. From Quebec we proceeded by Grand Trunk Railway 670 miles to Port Edward, at the junction of Lake Erie and Lake Huron. Thence we crossed the great Lakes Huron and Superior in one of the comfortable steamships of the North-West Transportation Company, touching at

several ports of call *en route* for Duluth—a voyage of 800 miles, which occupied four days. I was surprised to find that the only communication between the navigable waters of the two lakes is by means of an American canal on the American side of the Sault St. Marie Rapids, although there appear to be no insurmountable obstacles to the construction of an independent gateway on Canadian territory. Finding on inquiry at Thunder Bay that a section of the Canada Pacific Railway, which is now open to Winnipeg, was not then in operation, we proceeded by steamer to Duluth—a straggling town with a grandiloquent designation, the “zenith city of the unsalted sea,” as it has been ambitiously termed. Thence we traversed Minnesota by the Red River Valley route to Winnipeg, the capital of Manitoba, a distance of 470 miles. I have thus gone into details because I find that a general haziness prevails amongst otherwise well-informed persons as to the precise position of this new town of Winnipeg (or Fort Garry, as its site used to be called), many imagining it to be within a day or two’s journey of Quebec, whereas it is approximately 2,000 miles distant. What I have described is one of the summer routes; the navigation of the great lakes is now closed, and the all-rail road by Chicago and St. Paul is the only one available in winter.

The rapid progress of Winnipeg recalled to my recollection some of the gold-digging towns of Australia. On what was bare prairie a few years since there now stands a prosperous city of 25,000 inhabitants, with handsome churches, hotels, banks, stores (one of which forcibly called to mind a well-known establishment in Victoria Street, Westminster), public buildings, and a most excellent club. The telephone is in general use, and the hotel clerk can call in the services of the doctor, ascertain the whereabouts of missing baggage, or hail a cab, without leaving his desk. Situated as it is at the junction of two navigable rivers—the Red River and the Assiniboine—Winnipeg has been termed the gateway of the North-West, and already ranks fifth in point of commerce amongst the cities of the Dominion. It reminded me of Australia in more ways than one—I mean the spirit of speculation which appeared to rule supreme. When I was in Ballarat all classes loved to traffic in Band of Hopes, Great Extendeds, and

other mining shares; in Winnipeg dealing in land-lots (which, by an ingenious American process known as "booming," are forced up to fancy prices) is found sufficiently exciting. The sooner the mania runs its course, the better will it be, I think, for *bonâ-fide* settlers. The stock of furs at the Hudson's Bay Company's establishment would have gladdened the heart of a connoisseur. It included skins of the black and brown bear, buffalo, beaver, ermine, fox, lynx, martin, skunk, otter, wolf, musquash, and wolverine, which were being packed in bales for the London market.

From Winnipeg we journeyed over 400 miles westward to Moose Jaw Creek, the farthest point which the Canada Pacific Railway then reached, though it was being pushed forward at the rate of from three to four miles a day, 22 miles having been laid during the preceding week. Of course the line had been previously graded. The track-layers dwell in boarding-cars (the hospitalities of which we were privileged to share), built up on trucks, which are pushed forward as each half-mile of rails is laid; so that the men are always close to their work. The sleepers and rails, being brought to the rear of the cars by construction-trains, are carted to the front, and the rails are transferred to a trolley. As each pair of rails are laid in position the trolley is pushed forward, the spikers follow and secure them in their places, the work being done with marvellous precision and freedom from confusion. The men were paid 9s. a day and earned it, for they worked like heroes. We passed a day at the new capital of the North-West, the city of Regina, which then consisted of about thirty tents, and, I suppose, has been subjected to the usual process of "booming" long ere this. It was not a particularly attractive place in its then condition, but my friend, who is of keen sporting proclivities, found consolation on the Pile of Bones Creek in some good duck-shooting, in the absence of the anticipated herds of bison and such "wild fowl," which, alas, had long since retreated before the railway pioneers. How shall we face those fair friends who left us with the parting injunction, "Be sure you shoot a pemmican"?

We met some wandering bands of Indians—Crees and Assiniboines—who were provided with horses and tents, and seemed well cared for; indeed, they are treated like pet children by the paternal

Canadian Government. It was in their interest that the absolute prohibition of the liquor traffic was originally enacted, in conformity with the wise policy of the Hudson's Bay Company. In my opinion it is an unmixed blessing to the settlers at large and the casual traveller. Under its provisions thrift is encouraged, crime diminished, and a small police force of 350 men enabled to maintain order and security throughout the whole of this vast territory. When some of these energetic public servants first "boarded" our train on "constabulary duty" my excellent friend opened his eyes and drowsily remarked, "Why, surely they're Royal Engineers!"—a not unnatural observation in view of their scarlet tunics, imposing physique, and soldierlike set-up.

This is, indeed, a "great Lone Land," and one cold night, as we reposed supperless on the bare floor of a half-open truck, we recalled to mind the weary traveller who, when overtaken by hunger on the lone prairie, cut off the tail of his faithful hound, cooked it for dinner, and gave the dog the bone. Our four-footed companions had prudently stayed at home!

I will now endeavour to state in a few words my impressions of the country which I traversed. The railway opens up a level or slightly undulating prairie, sparsely cultivated after leaving Brandon, which is 140 miles west of Winnipeg, and the last town we saw *except* those on paper and two (Broadview and Regina) of canvas. For the most part the prairie is covered with high grass, which in places had been cut and stacked for winter fodder. I can say without hesitation that I never passed over a similar extent of country which contains so large a proportion of fertile soil, except in the Western States of America. Inferior sandy or swampy tracts here and there occur; but as a general rule the surface is covered from the depth of a few inches to several feet with a rich black mould, the accumulation of which is attributed to the annual decay of vegetable matter and the action of prairie fires. Another theory is that these plains at one time formed the bed of a vast lake. So much for the soil.

The question of water is often under discussion. The supply is at present derived from surface streams and shallow wells, and it is sometimes impregnated with alkaline matter to such an extent as to be

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detrimental to health. Indeed, the effect on a new comer is much the same as that which Colonel Burnaby's famous pills are said to have produced on the Arab sheik. It is, however, generally believed that by sinking wells to a moderate depth an ample supply of pure and wholesome water may be procured; it can be easily and inexpensively raised to the surface by means of the excellent wind-pumps which are in general use throughout Canada and the Western States. On the whole I should judge the North-West to be a well-watered country as compared with Australia and South Africa.

The great drawback seems to be the scarcity of timber. Occasional patches of white birch, poplar, willow, &c., are observable from the line, but nothing approaching to a forest. In a climate where the average winter temperature (according to Silver's Handbook) is 5° below freezing, the fuel supply becomes an important question. I am told on the best authority that vast deposits of coal exist, and will eventually be made available; but timber is required for building purposes and also for shelter. I think too great stress can hardly be laid on the necessity of early attention to tree culture. Forest reserves should be formed, suitable trees planted, and young plants distributed to settlers, who should be encouraged by free grants of land to protect them from prairie fires and from the ravages of cattle. By these means a mine of wealth may be created for future generations, and the present generation greatly benefited. I subsequently travelled 135 miles eastward of Winnipeg, and visited the romantic Lake of the Woods, whose surface is broken by rocky islets of every conceivable shape, estimated at over 10,000 in number. I passed through a well-wooded country, from which large supplies of sawn timber and fuel for firing are drawn. But labour is scarce and dear, the price of fuel in Winnipeg ranging from 28s. to 40s. a cord.

In conclusion, I have firm faith in the future of Western Canada, and believe that, from the superiority of its soil, it is destined eventually to become the most important part of the Dominion. The Canadians themselves are the best pioneers, and I was glad to meet many Ontario and Manitoba farmers who had sold their land to new-comers, and were pushing out further West. Inured as they are to the climate, and prepared to encounter the hardships and privations

which the occupation of a new country inevitably entails, these hardy pioneers are eminently fitted to pave the way for the influx of a large population. But I would strongly recommend those who are not physically strong enough to rough it or occupy themselves with manual labour to stay at home.

I will not attempt to say much about the future of the grand country I have endeavoured to describe, except that it seems to be marked out for occupation at no distant period by the flower of British yeomanry, who are likely to become still further improved by climate into a hardier race than will be found elsewhere in that vast continent. Is it not a possibility that the political greatness of the Anglo-Saxon may be transferred to that future seat of empire some generations hence? More unlikely things have happened. But my day-dreams are dispelled by a whispered reminder of the wise words of a Transatlantic sage: "Never prophesy till you know"; and I abandon my castles in the air to more practised thinkers who are accustomed to trace out in the shadowy future the destinies of our race.

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